1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52



This reluctance must be regarded as one of the main factors responsible for the growth of the institution of 'borrowing land', which we have described in the preceding chapter.

*Sowing and Planting*

The Nupe, possessing an elaborate calendar system which works with six seasons and twelve lunar months, have no difficulty in determining the coming of the rainy season. Besides, they regard the appearance (in April) of a small red insect, which is significantly called *gbama*, 'early rains', as a sign of the approaching rains. The first light showers, which as a rule are accompanied by thunderstorms, are ignored. After the first heavy rain, which may last for several hours or a whole night, has thoroughly softened the soil, village and town spring into activity. In the morning after the rain you will see the people wandering out to their fields. They walk in groups, neighbours or families together, fathers with their boys. Dogs trot behind their masters, and often a man or boy will lead a goat which will then feed on leaves and shrubs on the field. The men wear working dress: a loin-cloth and, if it is cold, a heavier cloth slung round the shoulders, and a straw hat as protection from the sun. They carry their hoe over the shoulder, and gourds with water, food and seeds, over the arm. In many parts farmers carry their bows and arrows with them when they go out to their fields as 'protection from wild beasts'—a habit which is dying out but slowly, although there is hardly any need for it to-day. I have never seen these weapons used.

The nature of the first farming activity depends on whether or not the farmer has done what 'good' farmers are expected to do, namely, planted his yams already in the rains, immediately after the harvest. If he has not done so he will now at once start preparing his yam field; if he has, he is free to turn his attention to the planting of bulrush-millet and maize. Of five farmers whose daily activities I was recording in Mokwa, three had planted yam in the rainy season and two (who both had to work single-handed) waited until the beginning of the new farming season. With the 'good' farmer, we will start with the planting of millet.

Again there are certain variations. Where millet and sorghum are planted as successive crops no hoeing or re-hoeing as a rule precedes the planting; as we shall see later the plots are normally prepared during the previous season. Where millet and sorghum are planted after other first-year crops or on a new plot, ridging, occupying the first few days of the new season, precedes the sowing. The technique of planting, moreover, varies slightly according to whether one plants on mounds or ridges, but is the same for both millet varieties and for sorghum. I will now describe the scene one will meet on the Nupe fields when planting is in progress. The farmer has divested himself of his superfluous clothing, his food and water gourds, and has placed his things out of the way, under a shady tree. Perhaps he has his small boys with him, whom he lets play by themselves in a corner of the field while he goes on with his work. Tied to his left arm the planter carries the seeds in a small

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

## APPENDIX V

## NOTES ON THE NUPE CALENDAR

THE calendar of the Nupe peasant is an agricultural calendar. It is based on lunar months, and starts with the first rains, i.e. roughly in April. From the beginning of the rains the people count twelve, thirteen, and sometimes fourteen months until the new rains break. The last month of the old year (i.e. the 13th or 14th month) is then identified with the first month of the new year. The year is divided into six seasons, each comprising two months, as follows:

*gbama* first rains
*zuzūkā* rainy season
*malikā* (cf. the Hausa *marka*)—heavy rains
*sabakā* time of growth
*gbāfere* cold season
*banagū* hot season, or small-pox season.

Frequently, however, the Nupe peasant refers to the different months of the year by their number only, speaking of 'first month', or 'second month', and so on. The name *zuzūkā* is also used to denote the whole rainy season, and the whole dry season is called *yikére*, which means, literally, harvest.

This calendar is the pre-Islamic, original, Nupe calendar, which is rapidly going out of use, specially in Bida and the larger, semi-Mohammedan, villages, being superseded by a Nupe adaptation of the Mohammedan calendar. The latter, also operating with twelve lunar months, may coincide with the Nupe peasant calendar in the years when the Mohammedan New Year falls in the neighbourhood of April. But when the two do not coincide, and differ by a month or more, the time reckoning of the peasants in the semi-Mohammedan districts is thrown into serious confusion.[1] The Mohammedans, incidentally, unlike the pagan peasants, use the names of the months rather than the numbers. The Nupe-Mohammedan names of the months are as below. It will be seen that the idea of the original Nupe calendar, with its twin months grouped in six seasons, has been preserved in the new nomenclature:

1. *Etswa navū*—month of the torches (so called after the custom of throwing fire-brands during the celebration of the Mohammedan New Year).
2. *Etswa bawa gani*—month preceding the *gani* (a Nupe ceremony).
3. *Etswa gani*—month of the *gani*.
4. *Etswa togaya*—'twin month' (taken over from Hausa).
5. *Etswa togaya guba*—second twin month. These two months are believed to be unlucky, and no important events, such as a wedding or naming-ceremony, will be celebrated during them.
6. *Etswa bawa azū za gbakó*—month preceding the fast of the old men (i.e. first part of Ramadan).

[1] In June 1936, travelling from Kutigi to Jebba, I found that the Mohammedanized people of Kutigi were counting the second month, while the pagan Jebba Islanders maintained that it was the fourth.

[p.409]

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52



805
184

7. *Etswa azū za gbakó*—month of the fast of the old men.
8. *Etswa bawa azū*—month preceding the (general) fast (i.e. Ramadan).
9. *Etswa azū*—month of the (general) fast.
10. *Etswa Salagi*—month of the small 'Sallah' (the first Mohammedan *Id* festival).
11. *Etswa bawa Salakó*—month preceding the great 'Sallah'.
12. *Etswa Salakó*—month of the great 'Sallah' (the second *Id* festival).

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52



With so much variety it is impossible to select a particular community whose rituals would be 'typical' of Nupe practice; rather, each village cycle of rituals is typical (or atypical) in its own way. Yet neither is it possible to describe every variety of Nupe ritual (several of which I only knew from hearsay or from informants' reports). What seems more important is to examine some such cycle of rituals within the setting in which it operates, that is, within the corporate life of the community for which it is primarily valid or, in Nupe parlance, by which it is 'owned'.[1] As regards the question, which particular cycle of rituals to select, I propose to resolve it by taking two instances, one from Doko and the other from Jebba Island. This compromise seems the most expedient both since I have actually observed the majority of rituals in these two places and since these represent an interesting contrast, Doko being a 'typical' inland village, with hereditary chieftainship, and Jebba Island a riverain community where chiefs are elected. Let me add that, from other points of view, both communities are also 'atypical'; Jebba, because it is one of the two villages possessing major 'relics' of Tsoede; and Doko, because it formerly belonged to a federation of villages (or 'towns' as the Nupe would say), which type of political organization is unique in Nupe country. As regards the two communities themselves, a full description has been given elsewhere and need not be repeated.[2]

One further point of more general import may be anticipated. In spite of the great variety of local cults the number of rituals performed and their place in the year's cycle do not differ greatly in the different communities. Usually there are one or two movable rituals, rarely more, and two or three fixed rituals, only a few villages having four or five; and though the dates of the fixed rituals vary somewhat from place to place, they fall more frequently in certain months (e.g. the 9th and 11th) than in others (e.g. the 3rd or 5th).[3] The corresponding months in our calendar, incidentally, can only be calculated approximately since the Nupe reckon in lunar months, the year beginning with the onset of the rains, and insert a 13th month every five years. In other years the 1st month is usually also called the 13th, especially when the rains are late, which not infrequently leads to confusion, some localities being temporarily a month out in their reckoning.[4]

[1] I am here using the phrase 'primarily valid' since certain rituals imply an additional, wider validity (or 'ownership') which extends to the whole sub-tribe or even tribe. This point will be examined later (see below, p. 103).

[2] See *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 19, 25, 35. [3] See the chart on p. 69.

[4] In 1934, for example, the 1st month was taken to have begun on March 15th in the eastern part of Nupe, but at the end of April I found that the people of Mokwa, in the west, had just started with their 1st month. For a fuller description of the Nupe calendar, see *A Black Byzantium*, Appendix V.